

The "Lord's Prayer"¹

Question: Concern has been expressed about the inclusion of the Lord's Prayer at Al-Anon Meetings in my area. Can you provide me with any information on how this prayer was selected to be used as part of the Al-Anon meeting format (I know AA uses it also!), or point me to any published material that will explain the selection of this prayer?

Reply: The Lord's Prayer has probably been used since the Oxford Group days of AA and continued in AA groups of that period. The use of the Lord's Prayer in Al-Anon has been questioned regularly over the years. The prayer itself is "not CAL", that is, it has no special standing in Al-Anon literature. While mentioned in CAL, it has not been published as a prayer in Conference Approved Literature as of 2009.

In 1995, the World Service Conference discussed prayers used at meetings. I was there. I was surprised at the diversity of opening and closing prayers in various parts of the country and the world. Even though there was no vote, the consensus appears to be that the choice of a closing prayer is up to the conscience of the individual group. This discussion can be read by looking at page 21 and 52 of the 1995 World Service Conference Summary and reprinted below.

Several NCWSA Assemblies² addressed the issues of prayers beginning in February 1989 when a motion to change the closing prayer from the Lord's Prayer to the Serenity Prayer failed. In September 1990, the Assembly voted to close with the Serenity Prayer. The following year, a spirited discussion was held concerning whether to close with the Serenity Prayer or the Lord's Prayer. The Assembly voted to close with the Lord's Prayer, while a second motion to close with the Serenity Prayer failed. At the following area World Service Committee meeting, this committee suggested a three-year trial at committee meetings and assemblies where one of four prayers would be used. A motion in 1992 accepted the recommendation of the Area World Service Committee. In 1997, a second motion identified the prayers to be selected from a hat. The prayers were the Lord's Prayer, Serenity Prayer, the Al-Anon Declaration and a Moment of Silence (of one minute).

No one suggested that this vote apply to groups.

Page 24 of the Service Manual³ contains the following statement, "Will all who care to, join me in closing with the prayer?
It is suggested that groups close in a manner that is agreeable to the group conscience. Many groups say the Al-Anon Declaration after their closing.

¹ Frequently Asked Questions are the personal opinion of the person who wrote the reply. It should not substitute for a thorough discussion leading to a group conscience at the appropriate levels of Al-Anon Family Groups.

² Motions are found at the NCWSA web site http://www.ncwsa.org/Docs/B28_NCWSA_Motions_Pass_Fail_200812.pdf

³ 2006 – 2009 Service Manual, page 24. Published by Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc. 1600 Corporate Landing Parkway, Virginia Beach, VA 23454-5617

Lord's Prayer⁴

Bill H. TX (E), Moderator

The issue centered on the growing number of Al-Anon members speaking out on the belief that the Lord's Prayer expresses religious ideas that are beyond the scope of the Twelve Steps and whether we are in fact violating our Traditions. The question was also raised on whether the World Service Conference would develop a guideline or resolution regarding this.

The session opened with a moment of silence for each member to be in touch with their Higher Power, followed by the Serenity Prayer. The moderator broke down each phrase of the Lord's Prayer and shared what they meant to him personally.

Comments from the floor were:

The group decided not to use the Lord's Prayer and ended the meeting with Let It Begin With Me. If members choose not to participate, it's okay to step out of the circle.

When I came to Al-Anon and heard the Lord's Prayer, I felt pretty angry at God and wanted to leave. I am now very protective of my program. I don't want to offend anyone. I don't like using the Lord's Prayer. Yet I don't like the Conference making a decision on this. We can make the fellowship aware of their options.

It's up to the group chairperson. They can use whatever they want for the opening and closing. If someone does not want to participate, they don't have to. I don't want the Conference making a decision on this.

Its up to the groups not the WSC to make rules or judgments over what the groups use. Many groups use the Serenity Prayer to open and Let It Begin With Me to close.

We had a disruption at assembly and ultimately put four prayers in a hat and drew one. We demonstrated to the groups that a choice was available. Just because it has always been used, doesn't mean that we have to continue.

The Lord's Prayer is not the same for all Christian religions. I'm concerned about people coming back. Group inventory is the answer; that inventory will keep members coming back.

I stood in the circle too afraid not to say the prayer. I can't stand in the circle now I feel suffocated. It isn't comfortable to feel

⁴ This message has been excerpted from "95 Summary, Al-Anon Family Groups Conference, Tarrytown, NY April 23 – 27, 1995. Published in 1995. Compiled and distributed by Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc. 2010 address is 1600 Corporate Landing Parkway, Virginia Beach, VA 23454-5617

excluded. I know the Lord's Prayer isn't CAL, but it has historical and traditional weight. People don't think of its offensiveness to others.

The suggested closing says, will all who care to..." I would like to see us encourage the Declaration Statement and write that in the suggested closing. It will help us remember our Twelfth Step.

Thank goodness when I came in they had the words Higher Power and God of my understanding. When I chair, I close with the Declaration, what others choose is their decision.

The chairperson in our group says, "If you care to join us in a moment of silence and say whatever prayer you care to..." 'this solved the problem for many of our groups.

Sometimes if you don't have a problem, you don't recognize it. One member was asked to chair a meeting, but she couldn't say the prayer. It made us look at how we structured the meeting and how we need to be sensitive to all our members.

You made it easy by offering the God of my understanding. We may not make it easy for all newcomers because we say a prayer that is so strong in the Christian Faith. I feel it has no place in meetings unless everyone wants to say it. Alcoholism is not a Christian disease. We live in a changing world and need to be sensitive.

I enjoy saying the Lord's Prayer, but when I look around the room and see people not saying it, I wonder where the group unity is. I don't know if I would be willing to go along with the WSC making a decision—that's the easy way. It's up to the group conscience.

I think the Lord's Prayer is a special prayer. I was prepared to go back to my area and tell them that there are some weird groups in the states. Thanks for sharing on this topic, now I have the material to address the topic properly. We probably have the same problems, too.

If the group takes a continual inventory, you can settle a lot of things. We brought back issues from the inventory that were prevalent. We asked for suggestions for the opening and closing and voted on each. Part of my growth is accepting the group conscience. I have to trust that God is leading and guiding our membership. It's up to the areas and the groups to decide, not the Conference.

I was always made to feel that this program is one of inclusion not exclusion. It would be nice to have a prayer that makes everyone feel welcome. I think the WSC could make a resolution.